Types of bilingualism in Cucapá among teaching and administrative staff at an indigenous elementary school in Mexicali, Baja California

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— *Abstract*—

Bilingualism is generally understood as dichotomous —one is either a balanced bilingual or not bilingual at all—. This article is part of a broader study that analyzes the meanings that teachers and other actors attribute to Intercultural and Bilingual Education. The present study aims to identify the types of bilingualism among two Cucapá speakers and one Paipai speaker, from the specialized literature; therefore, it addresses the meanings ascribed to bilingualism by the three participants: two teachers from the only elementary school in Mexico that serves the Cucapá people and their supervisor. The meanings were identified using a qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews and observation; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used. Once the meanings were identified, Wei's (2000) typology of bilingualism was used to categorize the three participants. Given that it is the teachers' responsibility to implement educational policies in the classroom, the meanings they attribute to bilingualism can shed light on the current situation of this language, which is at high risk of disappearing. Our findings indicate that the participants' understanding of bilingualism differs from what educational authorities claim. The results demonstrate that the meanings that indigenous teachers attribute to their language skills can directly influence their teaching practice in terms of teaching indigenous language. Therefore, these should be considered by those who design educational policies. Given that this is a qualitative study, it is not intended to generalize the results; however, given the particularity of the school, it becomes crucial to understand how the teachers working in that context give meaning to their experience, as this will guide their teaching practice in the classroom.

Keywords:

Bilingualism; cucapá language; indigenous language; meanings; language endangerment.

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In this document are presented the types of bilingualism identified in two teachers and one person in a head teacher position at the only school in Mexico where the Cucapá language is taught. This helps to address the gap between what the educational authorities in Baja California report about indigenous education teachers in the state, especially in Mexicali, in terms of bilingualism.

With the aim of establishing strategies to strengthen indigenous languages in the country, the General Directorate of Indigenous Education (now the General Directorate of Intercultural and Bilingual Indigenous Education) modified the Bilingual-Bicultural Indigenous Education Program, and in 1996 it launched the Intercultural Bilingual Education Program (Zolla & Zolla, 2010). However, in recent decades, the number of speakers of the Cucapá language has declined considerably, with estimates not exceeding thirty (Pascacio & Reyes, 2025). Thus, despite the objectives and guidelines of this educational policy, it has not been possible to promote bilingualism in the classrooms of the primary school in question, with Spanish being the mother tongue of the students and, consequently, the language of instruction.

The relevance of this article lies in its analysis of the types of bilingualism identified in two teachers at the Alfonso Caso Andrade primary school, which is a multigrade school, and in the person responsible for supervising the area to which the school belongs. Given that teachers are the ones in front of the class, identifying the type of bilingualism becomes important, especially since they are the ones responsible, according to the educational authority, for teaching the Cucapá language. On the other hand, the types of bilingualism of the person responsible for supervision provide a broader picture of bilingualism. Identifying these types of meanings can shed light on the current situation of this language, which is at high risk of disappearing (INALI, 2012), as well as serve as a starting point for teachers to recognize their own bilingualism and act accordingly.

Moreover, a contextualization of the Cucapá people and their language is presented, along with some official figures regarding the status of this language. The relevant literature on bilingualism and its types is also addressed.

Finally, in the results and discussion section, an analysis of the types of bilingualism identifies is presented.

LANGUAGE PLANNING

Language planning is defined as deliberate and intentional efforts to influence the behavior of others in terms of the acquisition, structure, or functional assignment of their linguistic codes (Cooper, 1989). Before Cooper (1989), language planning was divided into two types: corpus planning and status planning. Examples of corpus planning include the coining of new terms

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and changes in the spelling of words, while elevating a language to official or co-official status is an example of status planning. Cooper (1989) coined a third type of language planning: *language acquisition planning*. The relevance of adding this third type of language planning is evident, since actions aimed at promoting the acquisition and learning of a certain language are also required. In other words, it is a path toward bilingualism.

In the field of applied linguistics, language acquisition planning has been referred to as *educational language planning or educational linguistic planning* (Pereira, 2013). This research addresses the latter, language acquisition.

According to the definition proposed by Cooper (1989), *language acquisition* planning is the set of organized actions and efforts to promote language learning. These actions are not limited to the field of formal or informal education. Cooper even points out that economic policy measures to prevent the emigration of speakers of certain languages are examples of this type of language planning.

Cooper (1989) identifies two broad categories within this type of language planning: objective and method. In terms of objectives, Cooper points to three objectives of this type of planning: (a) acquisition of a language as a second or foreign language; (b) reacquisition of a language by communities in which it was once spoken; and (c) maintenance of a language (acquisition of the language by subsequent generations).

Regarding the method to achieve the objectives mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Cooper (1989) distinguishes three types: (a) those designed to create incentives or improve existing ones for learning a language; and (c) those designed to create both opportunities and incentives or improve existing ones simultaneously.

EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

For Paulston (1997), educational policies related to language are a subgroup within language planning that takes place in an educational system. The educational system can be defined as the "set of actors, structures, and mechanisms for initial and continuing training in National Education and the concerted private sector" (Michel, 1996, p. 15).

According to Sánchez-Santamaría and Espinoza (2015), educational policies can be measured in terms of three aspects:

(a) Political rhetoric, which is linked to the educational goals expressed in speeches given by political leaders. These speeches summarize the educational intentions that inspire a particular policy.
(b) Policy as a legal regulatory framework, that is, those found in decrees and laws that define explicit standards and guidelines for the National Education System, for example, the General Education Law.

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(c) Policy as practice, which is "the implementation of policy as rhetoric and as a legal framework, since through the translation of concrete actions and measures, the aim is to respond to the needs generated within the educational system" (Sánchez-Santamaría & Espinoza, 2015, pp. 386–387).

In Mexico, the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP, 2020) is the main educational authority at the national level. In the field of indigenous education, there is the General Directorate of Intercultural and Bilingual Indigenous Education (DGEIIB)[1] at the federal level; and at the state level, with the State Coordination of Indigenous Education (CEEI) in Baja California. These educational authorities are responsible for the design, implementation, and monitoring of educational policies.

In line with the above, Bentancur and Mancebo (2012) add that educational policies are the set of courses of action designed, decided upon, and effectively implemented by the educational authority within its sphere of competence in an educational system. In addition to actions, Bentancur and Mancebo consider that intentional inactions or omissions, mainly by educational authorities, are also educational policies. An example of this is the official policy of Castilianization, but also the *de facto* educational policy that continues to exist in the Mexican context (Canuto, 2013).

INTERCULTURALITY

Interculturality refers to the dynamics of relationships established in a context of cultural diversity (Barabas, 2014) and occurs when two or more groups, whose cultures are different, come into contact, either in a hostile or friendly way (Borboa-Trasviña, 2006). For Iño (2017), interculturality "adopts a position of respect for difference, dialogue with oneself, the interrelation between the local and the interior of a culture, the interrelation between cultures and their exchange, and trans-relationships" (p. 42) between diverse groups that coexist in the same geographical area; a locality such as El Mayor in Mexicali, even a school or a classroom, are examples of these trans-relations, as Iño calls them.

In the words of Tubino (2013), interculturality is concerned with the formation of intercultural citizens" committed to the construction of an authentic multicultural democracy that is inclusive of diversity" (p. 3). We

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1   The DGEIIB was created from the merger of the General Directorate of Indigenous Education (DGEI) and the General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education (CGEIB). Published in the Official Gazette of the Federation on September 15, 2020.

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must highlight the word *multicultural* that Turbino refers to. Actually, this word should not be so unfamiliar, given that Mexico is a melting pot of cultures and languages. As for languages, in addition to Spanish, Mexico has 68 linguistic groupings and 364 linguistic variants belonging to this set of groupings: the national indigenous languages (INALI, 2008). In addition, there are other languages that are not native to Mexico, such as Chipileño Veneto (a linguistic variant from in Italy) and Low German (a Germanic linguistic variant spoken by the Mennonites).

THE CUCAPÁ LANGUAGE AND THE CUCAPÁ

According to INEGI statistics (2021), although 7.97% of the population in Baja California identifies as indigenous, only 1.3% are speakers of some indigenous language; the most common being the Mixtec, Zapotec, Nahuatl, Triqui and Tarascan languages.

However, there are many other indigenous languages in the state. The indigenous population is divided into migrant and native groups, with the Yuman peoples, such as the Cucapá, forming part of the native population (Sariego, 2016; Velasco & Rentería, 2019). It should be noted that there are also other indigenous peoples in Baja California: *Kiliwa*, *Ku'ahl*, *Kumiai*, and *Paipai* (INALI, 2008). Nonetheless, this paper only deals with the Cucapá people, as they are the only indigenous people present in Mexicali, Baja California.

The Cucapá language, also known as *kuapá* [kua'pa] and *koipai* (INALI, 2008; Moctezuma et al., 2013), belongs to the Cochimí-Yumana family, which geographically ranges from southern California and western Arizona, in the United States; northern Baja California and northwestern Sonora, in Mexico (Ibáñez, 2015). In Baja California, it is spoken in the municipality of Mexicali and also in San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora (INALI, 2008).

This language does not have a standard writing system. According to Eberhard et al. (2023), the language is not taught or used among Cucapá children and is not used in everyday life (Velasco & Rentería, 2019). INEGI (2021) reported 124 Cucapá speakers in Mexico; 21 of them in El Mayor, Mexicali (Baja California), but some studies suggest that the actual number could be much lower. Although official data puts the number at over a hundred, the actual number could be much lower in Baja California.

Alvarado et al. (2017), for instance, noted that there were only four speakers in the community of El Mayor. With the recent loss of important figures, such as the traditional leader Doña Inocencia González Sáinz and Doña Raquel Portillo, the number would have fallen to two. On the other hand, in meetings that have been held with Cucapá speakers in Baja California and Sonora, they calculated that there are approximately twenty Cucapá speakers in both states; as mentioned before, Pascacio and Reyes

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(2025) pointed out that the number could be around thirty. As with other indigenous languages at high risk of extinction, it is older adults who speak the Cucapá language most fluently (Pascacio & Martínez, 2021).

Fieldwork has made it possible to establish contact with fluent Cucapá users such as Ms. Margarita McLeish in Baja California, the Pesado Majaquez brothers, Ms. Aurelia, Ms. Rosa, and Ms. Amelia Chan in Sonora. Most of the people with whom contact has been established do not speak the Cucapá language with the same fluency as they do, but they have knowledge, especially isolated vocabulary, phrases, greetings, among other things. The situation poses challenges for the preservation and strengthening of the Cucapá language in the region.

Now, with regard to the teachers participating in this study, the Baja California Secretariat of Education reported that they have a basic knowledge of the indigenous language, noting that both teachers and students "have a basic knowledge (Level 1) about the language of their community, they know words such as numbers, fruits, colors, forms of greetings and farewells, imperative orders, songs and phrases" (Secretariat of Education, 2020, p. 3). This can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Elementary teachers speaking Yumana languages in Baja California

School/Community	Teacher	Indigenous language	Level of proficiency [a]	Other indigenous language	Level of proficiency
Elementary School/ La Huerta	Teacher 1	paipai	I[b]	kumiai	I[b]
	Teacher 2	paipai	I[b]	kumiai	I[b]
Elementary School/ Santa Catarina	Teacher 1	paipai	I[b]		
	Teacher 2	paipai	0[c]		
Elementary School/San Antonio Necua	Teacher 1	kumiai	I[b]		
	Teacher 2	Spanish	0[c]		
Elementary School/San José de la Zorra	Teacher 1	kumiai	I[b]		
	Teacher 2	kumiai	I[b]		
Elementary School/El Mayor Cucapá[d]	Teacher 1	kumiai	I[b]		
	Teacher 2	cucapá	I[b]		

Note. Adapted from the Secretariat of Education (2020).
    a There are no descriptions for the proficiency levels.
    b I = Incipient.
    c It is unclear why the SE reports this value.
    d This is the name used by the SE for the community.

Although the educational authority reports an incipient level of proficiency, it cannot be stated (nor ruled out) that this nomenclature derives from Wei's typology (2000) or from a more holistic perspective of bilingualism

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(Baker & Wright, 2021; Valdés, 2003). Notwithstanding, knowledge of numbers, fruits, colors, greetings, and farewell phrases is unlikely to promote effective communication.

BILIGUALISM

Bilingualism, generally understood as the ability to speak two languages with equivalent proficiency, is considered more the exception than the rule according to Crystal (2010). Although there are more bilingual than monolingual people in the world (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2013) and one in three inhabitants of the planet uses two or more languages for work, family or other reasons (Wei, 2000), most of them have different degrees of language proficiency (Baker & Wright, 2021).

Cohen (1970) emphasizes that bilinguals tend to be conceptualized in a dichotomous manner, without considering the various conditions and domains in which a person uses each language. Nonetheless, the specialized literature has now adopted the term "bilingualism" to include cases of people who speak more than two languages (Baker & Wright, 2021).

Valdés (2003) described bilingualism as a continuum with varying degrees of *proficiency*. As can be seen in Figure 1, it should be clarified that the concept of proficiency refers to the ability demonstrated in the use of a foreign language and can be applied both to the global use of the language and do that of a single linguistic skill in particular (Martín-Peris et al., 2005). Baker and Wright (2021) offer a representation of that continuum.

Language A												Language B
Monolingual in A	A_b	A_b	A_b	A_b	A_b	AB	BA	B_a	B_a	B_a	B_a	B_a	Monolingual in B

Note. Uppercase letters represent the dominant language. Lowercase letters of different sizes represent the user's proficiency levels. Adapted from Baker and Wright (2021).

Figure 1 . Degrees of proficiency of a bilingual person

Different levels of proficiency can be influenced by various factors, such as growing up in a bilingual environment, learning a second language (L2) in different contexts and at different ages (Henning & Pentón, 2016), whether it was learned after a certain age —although there is no evidence of a critical period for learning an L2, there is evidence that some periods are more advantageous than others for this purpose (Baker & Wright,2021) — or the degree of exposure to the L2 (Baker & Wright, 2021; Feltes, 2020). The combination —or absence of one or more— of these factors will result in a continuum in terms of the degree or level of bilingualism of a language user, rather than a dichotomy between being bilingual or not. Cook (2011)

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emphasizes that definitions about bilingualism can vary historically, culturally and individually, even allowing for a subjective definition at the individual level.

This means that there may be a definition of who is bilingual, even at the individual level, and in a subjective manner. For this reason, the following section presents a broader and more comprehensive definition of types of bilingualism, moving away from the dichotomous perspective to explore the open question: who is a bilingual?

Types of bilingualism

There is a simplistic view of bilingualism (Baker & Wright, 2021). This may originate due to the use of the four basic language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) to refer to someone as bilingual. These basic skills are further subdivided into receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). This, however, presents a challenge when defining bilingualism and bilingual individuals. Therefore, a broader definition is required that encompasses the different degrees of proficiency referred to in Figure 1.

According to Baker and Wright (2021), a more precise definition should encompass different degrees of proficiency, considering active skills such as speaking and writing in both languages, as well as passive skills, including understanding and reading without necessarily speaking or writing. This leads to recognition of receptive bilinguals and passive bilinguals. Added to this, Henning and Pentón (2016) point out the variability in bilingual fluency, from a high degree almost indistinguishable from the mother tongue (L1) to lower levels. As shown in Table 2, Wei (2000) even defines 27 types of bilinguals.

Table 2
Types of bilinguals

Types of bilingualism	Definition
Late bilingual	Someone who becomes bilingual after the period of childhood.
Additive Bilingual	Someone whose languages are combined in a complementary way.
Ambilingual/balanced bilingual/ symmetrical bilingual/equilingual	Someone whose command of the two languages is identical or nearly identical.
Ascendant bilingual	Someone whose ability to function in L2 is developing due to constant use of L2.
Early bilingual	Someone who has acquired both languages during early childhood.
Asymmetrical bilingual/ receptive bilingual /passive bilingual	Someone who understands an L2 orally or in writing; but cannot necessarily speak or write it.
Compound bilingual	Someone whose languages are learnt at the same time and regularly, in the same context.

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Consecutive bilingual/ successive bilingual	Someone whose L2 was added at a later stage than the acquisition of L1.
Co-ordinated bilingual	Someone whose languages were learnt in different contexts
Covert bilingual	Someone who conceals or hides their knowledge of an L2 due to linguistic attitudes.
Diagonal bilingual	Someone who is bilingual in (1) a non-standardized language or variant and (2) a standardized language that is not closely related to the former.
Dominant bilingual	Someone who is more proficient in one of their languages and uses it much more than the other.
Dormant bilingual	Someone who has emigrated to another country (where a language other than their L1 is spoken) for a considerable period of time and has few opportunities to keep their L1 in use.
Functional bilingual	Someone who works in both languages — with or without fluency— for performing a task.
Horizontal bilingual	Someone who is bilingual in two different languages, but with equal or similar status (hegemonic, for example).
Incipient bilingual	Someone who is in the early stages of bilingualism, where one of the languages is not yet fully established.
Maximal bilingual	Someone who has near-native proficiency in the languages they speak.
Minimal bilingual	Someone with knowledge of only a few words or phrases in L2.
Natural bilingual/primary bilingual	Someone who has not taken training courses to —and is not in a position to do so— interpret or translate easily in both languages.
Productive bilingual	Someone who not only understands but also speaks and possibly writes in two or more languages.
Recessive bilingual	Someone who begins to experience some difficulty in either understanding or expressing themselves in one of their languages due to lack of use.
Secondary bilingual	Someone whose L2 has been learnt through formal instruction (language classes).
Semilingual	Someone with insufficient knowledge of either of their two languages.
Simultaneous bilingual	Someone whose languages have been present since the beginning of their speech (acquired both languages).
Subordinate bilingual	Someone who experiences interference from L1 on L2 during use; that is, they use L1 to learn L2.
Subtractive bilingual	Someone who learned an L2 at the expense or detriment of their L1.
Vertical bilingual	Someone who is bilingual in (a) a standardized language and (b) a language that is different but close to L1 or a variant of it.

Note: Adapted from Wei (2000). Own translation.

Baker and Wright (2021) argued that the binary classification of bilinguals and monolinguals, as well as the single categorization of bilinguals, is simplistic in the face of the broad spectrum of bilingualism, as presented in Table 2. Furthermore, they also emphasize the need to recognize different degrees of proficiency on a continuum rather than static classifications.

Addressing the issue of bilingualism in Baja California is complex due to the many aspects that the term alone implies; the bilingualism referred to in this article is one that Wei (2000) does not address: popular bilingualism —as opposed to elite bilingualism—. These types of bilingualism and their main characteristics can be seen in Table 3 below.

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Table 3

Differences between Elite Bilinguism and Popular Bilinguism

Elite Bilinguism (privileged)	Popular Bilinguism (circumstantial)
Characteristic of the middle and upper classes.	Result of contact between different ethnic groups.
They are usually "educated" people.	Result of contact between an ethnic group and a majority language.
People choose to learn another language and which language(s) to learn.	It occurs involuntarily, and they must learn another language in order to survive and participate in society.
Students and professionals who travel regularly or who migrate to another country and learn the language.	Speakers of a minority language have no choice but to learn the majority language of the place where they live.
They do not lose their L1 but rather add an L2. L1 continues to be used.	L1 is a minority language and does not enjoy prestige*.
L1 is the majority language; L2 enjoys great prestige*.	They often learn L2 and stop using their L1 because it lacks prestige. *.
L2 brings social and economic benefits.	It occurs at a more collective level.
It is given at a more individualized level.	

Note: Baker and Jones (1998), Baker and Wright (2021), Guerrero (2010), Paulston (1980)
    L1 = Mother tongue or Language 1..
    L2 = A language acquired or learned after the mother tongue—or simultaneously.
    * = Prestige is assigned by society. It has to do with linguistic attitudes, not with aspects inherent to languages.

In any case, it is important to be aware that bilingualism will mean different things depending on who you ask: a foreign language teacher, a university student, a speaker of an indigenous language, or a politician, for example, will have different ideas and opinions on the subject (Cook, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

This article is derived from a doctoral thesis to analyze the meanings that teachers of an indigenous primary school and other members of the community of El Mayor, Mexicali, Baja California attribute to Intercultural and Bilingual Education. For this paper, in particular, the meanings regarding bilingualism have been addressed. Based on the literature review and the analysis of the interviews, the meanings attributed, more specifically, to the type of bilingualism of the participants were determined. The types of bilingualism of three of the eight participants in the study are presented: one participant who holds a supervisory position and two female teachers from the Alfonso Caso Andrade multigrade elementary school. The other five participants in the doctoral thesis work are students, graduates, and parents. As mentioned above, this article addressed the meanings of teaching and administrative staff.

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In the informed consent form provided to the three participants, they authorized the use of their names for the research and derivate works, such as this article. On the contrary, for practical reasons, when the corresponding interview fragments are presented, the terminology Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and Educational Authority will be used. Figure 2 presents the consent form used.

Note. Own elaboration

Figure 2 . Informed consent form

For the analysis of the data, the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (AFI in Spanish) has been used; which involves a series of six stages that Howitt and Cramer (2011) propose, namely:

(a) Familiarization with the case and initial comments.
(b) Initial identification of issues.
(c) Identify connections in topics.
(d) Preparation of tables.
(e) Analysis of other cases.
(f) Writing the analysis.

In the AFI the interpretation es central (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Nizza, 2022). This research had a particular focus on understanding participants' experiences and the meaning they assign to those experiences. In accordance with AFI guidelines, the analysis process also implies that the data

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collected from each participant will be analyzed individually. Therefore, researchers have delved into each transcript by making exploratory notes, which are classified into three types: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual (Smith & Nizza, 2022). We then proceeded to identify the meanings attributed to bilingualism, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Meanings attributed to Bilingualism

Category	Experiential statements
	A bilingual person is someone who speaks quickly.
	A bilingual person is someone who knows how to use isolated words and phrases
Bilingualism	Self-recognition as bilingual is not sufficient.
	It is important how the indigenous language is spoken and written.

Note. The term bilingual has been inserted to match the most common term in specialized literature. Participants referred to the term "speaker" as one who speaks the Cucapá language in addition to Spanish.

Once identifies, these meanings were placed into one of the types of bilingualism in Wei's (2000) typology. These meanings and the corresponding type (or types) of bilingualism are presented in Table 5.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All participants are popular bilinguals since, according to what was presented in Table 3, the bilingualism of the three participants is the result of contact between different ethnic groups and contact between an ethnic group and a majority language. In addition, because it occurs involuntarily and they must learn another language and participate in society; in this case, Spanish.

On the other hand, according to the typology of Wei (2000), it is possible for a person to be at different stages of bilingualism. Considering that bilingualism is a continuum (Baker & Wright, 2021; Valdés, 2003), it would be incongruous to affirm that the type of bilingualism in which a person is located is static; on the contrary, it is dynamic. Thus, each participant falls into different types of bilingualism, as can be seen in Table 5.

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Table 5

Types of bilingualism among participants

Types of participants	Type(s) of bilingualism
Educational authority	Early bilingual, functional bilingual, productive bilingual.
Teacher 1	Incipient bilingual, minimal bilingual, Asymmetric bilingual/receptive/passive.
Teacher 2	Incipient bilingual, Minimal bilingual, Recessive bilingual, Asymmetrical bilingual/receptive/passive, Consecutive bilingual/successive.

The following paragraphs present some excerpts from fragments with the participants to justify why they have been labeled in one or another type of bilingualism.

EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITY

The participant who has a supervisory position in school zone 711 stated that she learned both the Paipai language and Spanish at an early age. In fact, she only learned Spanish once she entered school. It is interesting that the participant states that she has been *pressured* to learn the Spanish language.

> Well, I learnt Spanish, but the teacher never taught me Spanish, but rather I learned it through peer pressure and all that. So, this is something very important, because you don't even realize when you learned [the language] (Educational authority).

Thus, the participant points out that the language she acquired first was Paipai, and then she acquired Spanish; so she is considered an early bilingual. It is also relevant that the participant makes a contrast when she says that the teacher did not teach her Spanish, but that she did not realize it when she learned it. In this matter, Krashen (1982) highlights the difference between *acquiring* and *learning*: those who acquire a language —L1— do not do so consciously, since they communicate in it and acquire it through use. On the other hand, learning a language is a conscious process, regularly, but not always, of an L2.

The participant is a functional and productive bilingual, as she indicates that she has taught the language before and used the Paipai language as a language of instruction. That is, she uses the indigenous language fluently to perform a task, in this case, to teach it. She is also a productive bilingual, as she indicates that the language written in Paipai played an important role in her classes.

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So, we were gradually working on the language until we got to the verbs. We did exercises such as how to arrive at a house, knock on the door, greet, say: "I came to this, I came to that", receive a phone call. In other words, making the dialogues; writing the dialogues and pronouncing them (Educational Authority).

The participant in question in this section can read and write in Paipai, which allows her not only use writing in the indigenous language, but also to adopt a critical but respectful attitude towards the use of the written language by other members of the Paipai community. This can be seen in the following excerpt.

For example, sometimes I have seen colleagues who post on Facebook or something like that and, well, there are words that they don't finish spelling well. But, I say: "well, that is an improvement". I mean, I at least, have never criticized or observed. I'd better keep quiet (Educational authority).

TEACHERS

As for the teachers, both are incipient bilingual and minimal bilingual because they have knowledge of only a few words or phrases in L2. In a consultation with the Secretary of Education of Baja California, the educational authority indicated that the teachers have "incipient knowledge (Level I) of the language of their community, they know words such as numbers, fruits, colors, forms of greetings and farewells, imperative orders, chants and phrases" (Secretariat of Education, 2020, p. 3).

Because it is assumed that, since we are from indigenous education [...], we have already mastered the language. When the educational system knows very well; the authorities know very well that it is not like that (Teacher 2).

On the other hand, it is relevant that teacher 1 attributes the knowledge of some words and phrases in Cucapá to a very limited lexicon of the language and not to her own bilingualism. This can be observed in the following excerpt.

There is very little vocabulary [in Cucapá]. There are not as many words as in Spanish. Sometimes you have to take a dive, to think about what word can be substituted in Cucapá for the word that is. That is, there are not so many words [lexicon] (Teacher 1).

Now, it can be argued that being in the early stages of bilingualism could motivate them to take actions that will lead them to continue their development

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as bilinguals. This is especially important since they are teachers in an indigenous school and are expected to teach the Cucapá language to their students. In fact, a fragment is presented in which teacher 1 points out that she only knows a few words in Cucapá. Interestingly, it is observed that the teacher has the idea that bilingualism is a continuum and is progressive.

> But, at least in my family, they never stopped us […], if I said "jatpá", instead of "jatpa'a", that is "coyotes"; but I was missing two letters. No, on the contrary, they applauded me because I already knew one more word that, maybe, was not exactly the way they said it; but, well, I already knew [a new word] (Teacher 1).

In addition to the limited use of oral language by both teachers, and because Cucapá does not have a standard writing system (although there are proposals, there is no consensus), exposure and access to written materials in that language is limited. Thus, it can be argued that both teachers are also asymmetrical/receptive/passive bilingual since they understand an L2 orally or in writing but cannot necessarily speak or write it.

There is a different situation with teacher 2; who is also a speaker of Kumiai, another Yuman language. Thus, Cucapá is one of three languages that the teacher uses in certain contexts. Since the teacher points out that she learned Kumiai as a child, after she learned Spanish, this makes her a consecutive/successive bilingual. This is observed in the following excerpt.

> At the beginning it was more problematic because I had to start from scratch; practice, investigate […]. So, I had to start from zero; from doing research with the people. Before there were more [Cucapá] speakers (Teacher 2).

Finally, teacher 2 presents a peculiar situation with the three languages she speaks. During the interview, the teacher indicated that she is more proficient in Kumiai than in Cucapá. However, this situation of speaking three languages presents certain challenges. On the one hand, the teacher points out that in the elementary school where she works she cannot practice the language belonging to her people, the Kumiai, and this is causing her to forget it. Thus, we speak of recessive bilingualism, i.e., that begins to experience some difficulty in either comprehension or expression in one of its languages due to lack of use.

> I am a Kumiai speaker. I am not 100 percent fluent. And, more so because I no longer practice it here; but I do speak the language, I do speak the Kumiai language. As I already speak the Cucapá language, which I also do not master 100 percent; neither one nor the other. But I do speak them, well, I can understand (Teacher 2).

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On the other hand, being languages that belong to the same linguistic family, there are similarities. These similarities have caused confusion for this teacher. The following excerpt allows us to observe another instance that places her type of bilingualism as recessive.

> I already mix up what is Cucapá with Kumiai. And, I say: "well, in a certain way I have to dom...that...I have to practice both and I already confuse the two. I mean, I put words together; if I am going to write a text and I attach the Cucapá with the Kumiai. But, well, it is part of. I just go back to, to retake what I wrote and everything and I say: "Ah, no, yes, this is true, this is not right, this word does not go here. This is Kumiai and I am writing in Cucapá" (Teacher 2).

Thus, as discussed in this section considering the results from the analysis of the interview transcripts, the teachers and supervisor are bilingual from a broader and more holistic perspective (Baker & Wright, 2021; Valdés, 2003; Wei, 2000). This differs from what the Secretariat of Education of the state of Baja California reports. For this authority, both teachers participating in this study, as well as the rest of the teachers in other indigenous schools that serve indigenous communities of the Cochimí-Yumana family, have an incipient level of knowledge of the indigenous language.

Although, in this regard, the educational authority states that it works "in partnership with the teachers themselves, with language revitalization actions" (Secretariat of Education, 2020, p. 3), the teachers point out that the courses they receive are more focused on didactic and pedagogical strategies; not specifically on language or bilingualism.

> The General Directorate of Indigenous Education at the national level designs the courses and they are downloaded through the teachers' center. Well, courses have been offered through the teachers' center and are available. In fact, there have been very good courses; the only detail is how to implement those contents (Educational Authority).

This means that the bilingualism of teachers is not considered by the Secretary of Education of Baja California, probably because it is ignored that bilingualism is not dichotomous but a continuum (Valdés, 2003).

> And, well, courses, common and ordinary courses of what we have here in the teacher training centers, but the same for all (Teacher 1).

This is interesting because teachers seem to be aware of the state of bilingualism but have not designed the necessary language policies or courses to address the situation. It is preferred to focus on purely educational

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aspects, leaving aside the linguistic aspect, which is equally important in an indigenous school.

> They just gave us an introduction to intercultural and bilingual education when we entered, because it is assumed that, as we are from indigenous education, teachers, professors, people from the community, we already mastered the language. But, when the educational system knows very well, the authorities know very well that it is not like that (Teacher 2).

In addition, the courses offered by the secretariat seem to be aimed at balanced bilinguals, functional bilinguals and, possibly, productive bilinguals; not incipient bilinguals as reported in Table 1. Along with the poor relationship between the type of bilingualism of the teachers and the language (and didactic-pedagogical) courses offered, there is also a lack of follow-up of these courses.

> But, being in the area, they have given us courses, they have given us workshops of indigenous language. Recently, last year, they gave us a course on preparation or elaboration of didactic material, but it did not have much impact because we were not even in the classrooms. Eh, there was no follow-up; we received a 2-hour on-line course (Teacher 2).

Thus, it is evident that the State Secretariat of Education pays little attention to the type of bilingualism of teachers, which leads to courses that focus more on pedagogical aspects of curricular content rather than linguistic content. Additionally, the language-related courses that are offered seem to be aimed more at bilinguals who are at another point on the continuum proposed by Valdés (2003). Hence, the importance of first identifying the type of bilingualism of the teachers and then designing and creating opportunities for them to continue advancing their bilingualism in order to have an impact in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

Concerning the meanings attributed to bilingualism and the types of bilingualism in which the three participants place themselves, the specialized literature recognizes that the definition of who is bilingual and who is not can vary even at the individual level. It is possible that this is due to the fact that the definition of bilingualism has gone through different changes and has been strengthened and broadened each time.

So, the definitions that emerge from the interviews go together with the popular definition of being bilingual. That means, the one that defines

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a bilingual as balanced bilingual (ambilingual, symmetrical bilingual or equi lingual) whose command of both languages is identical or nearly identical. However, although Crystal (1997) notes that most of the World's population is bilingual or multilingual, the same author points out that balanced bilinguals are the exception, not the rule. For someone to aspire to this type of bilingualism, it is important that he or she be exposed to both languages from a very early age and that the opportunities to use both languages be abundant. Unfortunately, none of these situations occur among the members of the Cucapá people. Cucapá language is no longer the language used at home to communicate. Additionally, the spaces in which the language is used have been reduced in recent decades.

Moreover, considering balanced bilingualism as the reference standard can lead to unhelpful situations. It should also be remembered that the L1 of the students in El Mayor, Mexicali is Spanish. In this case, it would be advisable to offer a talk to teachers and educational authorities of the school zone in which bilingualism is approached from a non-dichotomous perspective. It is necessary to present bilingualism as a continuum. In this way, both teachers and educational authorities could have a more realistic perspective on bilingualism.

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